

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Virginia Department of Health Commemorates World Tuberculosis Day 2005

(Richmond, Va.) –The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is recognizing March 24 as World Tuberculosis (TB) Day by actively promoting TB awareness through continuing education programs for medical providers and the general public.

World TB Day honors the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch presented his discovery of the tuberculosis bacteria to physicians in Berlin, Germany. Today, VDH and various organizations around the world countries observe this date to acknowledge and promote awareness of this deadly disease.

“Tuberculosis control is a public health priority. As TB infection and disease continue to impact our community, we reaffirm our commitment to locate and remedy TB cases,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “With help from our community partners, we are able to identify and treat TB cases early in hopes of diminishing the prevalence of this potentially fatal illness.”

Globally, eight million people develop TB and, despite the fact that TB is highly curable, over two million die from it each year. It is imperative for VDH to maintain efforts to eliminate this disease from Virginia and contribute to the United States Healthy People 2010 objective of reducing the occurrence of TB to 1.0 case per 100,000 in population.

In 2004, Virginia reported a slight decrease in the number of new cases of persons with TB disease. The 329 new TB cases represented a one percent decrease from the numbers reported in 2003 (332 cases). Virginia’s rate of 4.4 per 100,000 demonstrates that tuberculosis remains a significant public health concern.

Of the 329 cases of TB disease in Virginia (divided nearly equally between men and women), the highest number of cases occurred in the Northern Virginia Region, followed by the Eastern and Central regions. The lowest number of cases was reported in the Southwest region. While TB disease occurs in persons of all ages, a high number of cases persist among persons in their economically productive years (25-44 years of age). Individuals in the 25-44 year age bracket are also at a higher risk for contracting HIV infection, and TB and HIV co-infection can make both diseases more difficult to treat.

“The number of cases of TB disease in 2004 represents only a slight decrease in the rates of recent years. Efforts will continue to be aimed at detecting persons with infectious TB disease and their contacts, treating all persons with TB disease and infection, and ensuring treatment completion,” said Director of the Division of TB Control Margaret Tipple, M.D.

Tuberculosis is an airborne disease that is acquired through prolonged, close contact with a person with active, infectious TB disease. TB can be cured by the appropriate oral anti-tuberculosis medications for a prescribed length of time (typically for 6-9 months).

When an individual is suspected of having active, infectious TB disease, the local health department will initiate testing of individuals who have been in close contact and spent a significant amount of time with a suspected TB patient. These close contacts receive the tuberculin skin test and medical follow-up.

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By administering a skin test to those who were in close proximity to the TB patient, those at risk for TB infection can be identified and treated quickly to prevent the onset of disease. A person who has not been exposed to someone with infectious TB disease does not need to be tested for TB infection.

Learn more about tuberculosis online by visiting the Division of TB Control's Web site, www.vdh.virginia.gov/epi/tb, or by calling its office at 804-864-7906.

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